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RETHINKING POLITICAL ACTION AND ENFORCING SEXUAL MORALITY: FINNISH WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR SUFFRAGE AS CONCEPTUAL POLITICS

Anna Elomäki

Women's suffrage was discussed in the Finnish Diet for the first time in 1897 when three representatives submitted a petition to the Estate of the Burghers. The petition stated that "all women in our country who meet the conditions set by our Constitution concerning the right to stand for election should be granted the same right to vote as men." One argument given was that women's participation would bring into political affairs "plenty of *siveellinen* power", which would "elevate the nation and its development." (Ensimmäinen Suomessa jätetty naisten äänioikeutta koskeva anomusehdotus 1897, 18.) The petition did not lead to any legislative changes, but it opened a public discussion on women's citizenship and suffrage, and compelled the Diet to make a stand on the issue.

Siveellisyys — and the adjective form *siveellinen* that was used in the petition — was one of the key concepts in articles and pamphlets in which the Finnish women's rights activists demanded the right for political participation at the beginning of the 20th century. A contemporary Finnish reader might translate this term as "morality", "chastity" or "decency". How is the term *siveellisyys*, which is nowadays often connected to prudish sexual morality, related to political participation and suffrage? In this article I seek to answer this question

by analyzing the meanings and usages of the term *siveellisyys* in Finnish women's argumentation for suffrage, providing a reading of the struggle for the vote from the perspective of conceptual politics.

In the texts produced by women's rights activists, the term *siveellisyys* (and the adjective *siveellinen*) receives a variety of meanings and is connected to a variety of semantic fields. First, it refers generally to issues related to morality, but this morality is also imbued with specific Christian and maternal values. Secondly, the definition of the term is related to a number of social issues, such as alcohol abuse, poverty, and working conditions. Thirdly, the term is used to refer to sexual morality, chastity and decency, and its counter-concept *epäsiveellisyys* is connected to the notion of "free love", having children out of wedlock, and a pleasure-seeking way of life.

Most of these aforementioned meanings have been thoroughly discussed in the research on Finnish women's history (see e.g. Markkola 2002; Sulkunen 1990; Ollila 1993; Ollila 2000). However, in the argumentation of Finnish suffragists, the term was also used with yet another meaning, including a distinct public and political dimension, which has not been discerned in the previous research. In the current article, I suggest that this dimension can be best understood through the Swedish concept *sedlighet*, as it appears in the political philosophy of the influential national leader Johan Vilhelm Snellman. Snellman's thoughts were influenced by Hegel's system of concepts, which uses the equivalent term *Sittlichkeit*.¹ Although Snellman wrote in Swedish, the influence of his political and philosophical writing on Finnish culture was significant.² Examining the particularities of Snellman's concept *sedlighet* can, therefore, shed light on the term *siveellisyys*, its Finnish translation.

Here, I refer particularly to the meaning of Snellman's concept *sedlighet* as discussed in Tuija Pulkkinen's studies. Pulkkinen points out that Snellman's *sedlighet* refers to the political nature of action (Pulkkinen 1989; Pulkkinen 2003). This is action in which the individual relies on his/her personal moral judgment and attempts to transform laws and norms in such a way as he understands to be the best for the political community. This political meaning, which I think was also present in the use of the word *siveellisyys* by the women's rights advocates, comes close to what in other discourses has been called civic action.

The concept of *siveellisyys* in its political meaning has a gendered character; for Snellman, only educated men were able to act in a *siveel-*

linen way when it came to civic or political action. However, the Finnish women's rights activists did not adopt the concept in their argumentation as such, but instead engaged in active conceptual politics with it. They effectively turned the concept that had been central to women's exclusion from democratic politics into a rhetorical instrument in their argumentation for inclusion. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that *siveellisyys* could not have become such a key concept in women's argumentation had it not carried its manifold meanings. It is precisely the intertwining of the levels of meaning of the term – related to sexuality, morality, and the Snellmanian notion of political action – that made the term such an efficient tool for suffragist argumentation.

In this article I will concentrate on explaining the interplay of two of the meanings of the term *siveellisyys* in the texts of the women activists: that of the Snellmanian idea of the political nature of action, and that of sexual morality. I argue that, on the one hand, suffragists used the term *siveellisyys* similarly to the Snellmanian concept of *sedlighet* in order to enable women to be considered as political actors, and also to construct an idea of political action, which they contrast to party politics. On the other hand, in the meaning related to sexual ethics, the term *siveellisyys* is used to indicate that not all women are capable of political action.

Siveellisyys – a multidimensional concept

According to Tuija Pulkkinen's interpretation of J.V. Snellman's political thought, the term *sedlighet* primarily describes the attitude behind the actions of individuals, and refers to the way in which the cultural habits of the community are shaped by the intersection of personal morality and conformity to existing laws and norms. In its purest form, *sedlighet* refers to a type of action whereby the inner moral decisions of the individual are emphasized over obeying the law. When the individual acts in a *sedlig* way, he/she acknowledges that the norms and laws of the community are part of his/her cultural background and makes conscious decisions on how the laws should be changed to promote the common good, creating new laws and rules.³ Central to the concept *sedlighet* is, therefore, the change in the shared values and norms of the community as initiated by individu-

als. The highest form of *sedlighet* can then be understood as a political or civic attitude aimed at changing norms and laws. (Pulkkinen 2003, 225; Pulkkinen 1989, 13.)

Nevertheless, this is not the only kind of relationship that an individual can – or should – have to the norms of the community. In Pulkkinen's reading of Snellman's system, *sedlighet* in this pure form is exclusively related to an orientation of action that Snellman calls *the state*. In the other two frames of action that make up Snellman's system, *the civil society* and *the family*, this political aspect of the term is missing. In action related to the civil society, *sedlighet* appears as a law-abiding attitude. In the family, individuals adopt laws and norms unconsciously, and *sedlighet* takes the form of an unreflective feeling of love. Although for Snellman, *sedlighet* is an important concept in relation to all of these three frames or orientations for action, it is a political concept only in relation to the state. (Pulkkinen 1989, 13–15; Pulkkinen 2003, 233.)

These aforementioned aspects of Snellman's concept *sedlighet* were carried over by the Finnish term *siveellisyys* that was used as its translation. However, *siveellisyys* was also a commonly used term in everyday discussions, and not only in the context of political philosophy. At least two different contexts of usage, with different sets of meanings, could be distinguished, and these are also present in texts of the women's rights activists.

At the turn of the 20th century, the term was used in everyday contexts to refer to everything related to ethics and morality. In the texts of the Finnish women's rights activists, the term is first of all used in a general sense to refer to an attribute of all the socio-cultural spheres of the nation from home to the political life, describing the moral ideals set for the individual and his/her ability to live according to them. In the rhetoric of women's rights activists the term refers to morality in general, and it also often receives a concrete meaning related to Christian worldview and maternal values. *Siveellisyys* is also strongly connected to the idea of women's superior morality. Partly because of motherhood, women are understood to be able to follow moral ideals better than men, and to help others to do the same. In the discussed texts, suffragists often write that women are "a *siveellinen* power" which is needed to elevate the nation, and that "*siveellinen* values", previously only visible within homes and cherished by women, should be made part of political decision-making (e.g. Hagman 1906, 18; 'Kansannaisen ystävä' 1905, 149).

Another important context in which the term was used at the turn of the century was the so-called “*siveellisyys* problem” (*siveellisyyskysymys*). Women’s rights’ advocates use this term to refer to such things as prostitution, a double standard of sexual morality, the organization of marriage and family-life, and other issues related to “sexual decency” (*sukupuolisiveellisyys*), as well as to alcohol abuse and working conditions. Pirjo Markkola has called this context “moral reform” (Markkola 2002). Although we are looking at a large number of issues, *siveellisyys* is often reduced to a narrower meaning than morality in general: to sexual norms. A *siveellinen* individual is sexually pure: he or she controls his/her desires and allows sexuality and love to enter his/her life only in marriage. Indecency (*epäsiveellisyys*) is connected to desires, enjoyment, and “free love”.

It is normally suggested that the Finnish suffragists speak of morality and sexuality in their political struggle when they use the term *siveellisyys*. I argue that in the argumentation for the vote the term *siveellisyys* had a distinct dimension related to public and political life. I suggest that this dimension can be best understood by returning to J. V. Snellman’s concept *sedlighet* and by examining how the usages and meanings of the term *siveellisyys* in women’s texts are related to Snellman’s idea of *sedlighet* as political or civic action. In their argumentation women did not do something as simple as accept or refuse the idea of *sedlighet*, the highest form of which Snellman understood as a capacity of educated men only. Instead the suffragists used it for their own purposes in order to point out that women can also be political actors capable of taking part in interpreting the will of a community and in making decisions that shape the future of the nation.

In order to ground this claim, a wide selection of texts discussing citizenship, suffrage, and women’s public participation (e.g. pamphlets, newspaper articles, and articles published in magazines edited by women’s rights and working class women’s organizations)⁴ were read. Most of the texts were published between the years 1904–1907. This was the period of the radical suffrage reform, when Finland’s political system, based on the traditional four-estate division in which less than 10% of Finns had the right to vote, was changed into a modern representative democracy based on universal and equal suffrage. This was also an extremely politically charged period, as the suffrage reform was pushed through in the aftermath of the General Strike of 1905, which intensified the already strained relations between the social classes almost to the point of a civil war. (Sulkunen 2007, 35, 39.)

The most outspoken advocates for women's suffrage were a relatively small number of bourgeois women's rights activists who were members of the Finnish Women's Association (*Suomen Naisyhdistys*) or the more liberal Women's Rights Association Union (*Naisasialiitto Unioni*). Working class women also demanded political rights for women, but in less gender-specific terms. The women of different social classes did not constitute a common front in regards to the suffrage question. Most bourgeois women's rights advocates wanted to maintain a system in which suffrage was based on wealth, but extended the criteria and allowed women to vote under the same conditions as men. It was feared that workers' movement's demands for the expansion of suffrage to all men and women was too radical and too gender-neutral, and could result in removing women from the picture. This bourgeois women's position was unacceptable to the working class women, who subsequently argued for universal and equal suffrage in the context of the workers' movement. The conflict between different groups of women mirrored the boundary between the bourgeois suffrage movement and the general suffrage movement. (Sulkunen 2007; Sulkunen 2005, 34–38.)

These differences are also visible in the way women use the *siveellisyy*s-vocabulary in their argumentation. In the texts of working class women, the term *siveellisyy*s is not as central as in the writings of the upper and middle class women, and the Snellmanian dimension of *sedlighet* is not present in their argumentation. Instead, the term *siveellisyy*s receives a meaning close to that of common decency and sexual morality.

The term *siveellisyy*s has the most significant role in the writings of Lucina Hagman. Hagman grew up in a middle class family and graduated as a schoolteacher. She was the first president of the Women's Rights Association Union, and the founder of the Martha Association (*Marttaliitto*), a household oriented organization giving civic education to lower class women and constructing female identity around maternal values. In the first parliamentary elections she was elected as a Member of Parliament from the ranks of the liberal Young Finnish Party (*Nuorsuomalainen puolue*).

Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg, Hilda Käkikoski, Ilmi Hallstén, Elisabeth Löfgren, Maikki Friberg, Hilma Räsänen, Hilja Pärssinen and Miina Sillanpää are other personalities whose writings are analyzed here. Gripenberg, Käkikoski, Hallstén and Löfgren were ac-

tive members of the Finnish Women's Association, and Gripenberg and Käkikoski were elected to the parliament as representatives of the conservative Finnish Party (*Suomalainen Puolue*). Hilja Pärssinen and Minna Sillanpää were active figures in the women workers movement, and were elected to the Parliament as representatives of the Social Democrat Party. Hilma Räsänen was elected to the Parliament from the ranks of the Agrarian League (*Maalaisliitto*). Maikki Friberg was one of the key actors in the Women's Rights Association Union and was on the list of the Young Finns Party, although she was not elected. (Lähteenmäki, Markkola & Ramsay 1997.)

Of particular interest are the usages of the term *siveellisyys*, which connect the term with citizenship, political participation and the state. These uses point to moments when women activists were able to utilize the conceptual resources available for them, as well as unlikely concepts, to their advantage. Detecting the political dimension of the term close to the Snellmanian *sedlighet* makes it possible to describe women's rights activists as political thinkers who contributed to the understanding of the key concepts of their time, and who participated in the discussion initiated by the theorists of Finnish nationalism on the ways in which politics should be understood and what is expected from the ideal political actor.

Women's rights activists, J.V. Snellman and conceptual change

Women's argumentation and aspirations for political participation have often been linked to national political cultures and ideologies, which have provided women with discourses and vocabularies for making their claims. The early women's rights activists such as Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft, in addition to the women's rights movements of the 19th century, were influenced by the discourses on individual rights and responsibilities and citizenship, and the concepts women used came from the political language of the era and were shaped by men. However, women did not adopt these political vocabularies as such, but instead used the concepts for their own purposes. (Landes 1996, 306–308; Scott 1996, 2–3.)

In Finland, women also adopted some features from the national political culture in their argumentation for the right to vote. The Finn-

ish political and nationalist discourse was shaped during the 19th century, and among its central ideas were the importance of *siveellisyys*, the unity of the fatherland, homes as the moral basis of the nation, and motherhood as women's calling (Häggmann 1994; Juntti 2005). When women began to demand political rights at the end of the 19th century, these ideas had a significant role in their argumentation.

The presence of the Snellmanian concept *sedlighet* in the discourse of women's rights activists is curious, as it is a gendered concept, which in its highest and purest form is constructed as masculine and is, therefore, opposed to the idea of women's political participation. Snellman himself took a negative stance towards women's political participation, and when writing about political action, he always explicitly referred to men. According to Snellman, women could not participate in politics because they did not have the capacity for self-reflection and creative thinking needed for making cultural and political reforms. Women's political action could have also been dangerous, because contact with the dirty political world could have resulted in women losing their ability to educate citizens and transfer the cultural habits of the community to new generations. For Snellman, home was women's true sphere of activity, where her role was to be a mother, an educator and the moral spine of the community. In Snellman's thought, therefore, women were the conservative force of the culture, unconsciously carrying on the tradition and transmitting it to their children, whereas social change and political action were the task and responsibility of educated men. (Jalava 2005, 184; Karkama 1994, 43; Ollila 1990, 26–33; Pulkkinen 1989, 13–14.)

This conception had practical consequences for the ways in which women's public activities were understood. According to Eira Juntti, the nation-building discourse of the mid 19th century did not include women's emerging activities in the public sphere as political activities, even though, from a contemporary perspective, they were related to the common good, betterment of society, and the promotion of 'Finnishness'. Political activities were constructed as male activity, whereas women's public activities were located in a distinct sphere, which was consequently conceptualized as "social". (Juntti 2004, 65, 80, see also Riley 1988.)

When Finnish suffragists adopted the concept of *sedlighet/siveellisyys* as a basis of their argumentation for the right to vote, they did it despite its gendered character. They did not adopt all the features of

Snellman's notion; instead, they used the strong, culturally important concept to reach their own ends. It seems that, in their argumentation, women made an important conceptual move: they transformed this concept, which strongly implied women's exclusion from the political sphere, to the very foundation of women's political agency.

In women's texts, *siveellisyys* is constructed as a feminine rather than a masculine or universal quality. However, when Lucina Hagman, Maikki Friberg, and other women wrote that *siveellisyys* and womanhood are related to each other, they did not only reinforce the idea that women are more moral or chaste than men. Indeed, it is important to note that a connection between *siveellisyys* and femininity is also established in relation to the meaning of the term close to the Snellmanian sense of the political and ethical person: *siveellisyys* refers to the capacity to lead social change, and not to conform to existing norms. The terms "*siveellinen vapaus*" (*siveellinen freedom*) and "*siveellinen velvollisuus*" (*siveellinen responsibility*), which appear frequently in the texts, have an important role in making this connection.

In their argumentation for the vote, women repeatedly point out that political and civil rights alone are not enough to guarantee that women have an impact on the development of the nation. These "outer freedoms" are only steps towards a higher goal, which is sometimes called "*siveellinen freedom*". As teacher Ilmi Hallstén elaborates: "The suffrage and citizenship rights are steps toward the unified and strong *siveellinen* female character. The Finnish woman shall with and through her outer freedom show that she has developed "free in a *siveellinen* way; free from selfishness" (Hallstén 1905). Hagman adds that women have to be "free in a *siveellinen* way" before they are able to make contributions to the political life of the nation. The "*siveellinen freedom*" that Hallstén and Hagman refer to is in contrast with the liberal freedom acquired through rights. It is first and foremost connected to becoming an independent and self-conscious person, a process in which the individual acknowledges her responsibility for the nation and the common good (e.g. Hallstén 1908, 4; Löfgren 1898, 8–9; Räsänen 1906, 11). "*Siveellinen freedom*" is, therefore, close to the German ideal of freedom, also adopted by Snellman, which is understood as responsibility rather than as individual freedom (see Pulkkinen 2000, 11–13).

This interpretation is supported by the fact that Lucina Hagman uses the expression "*siveellinen responsibility*" in addition to the ex-

pression "*siveellinen* freedom". Although Hagman states that women's "great *siveellinen* responsibility is to educate new generations to grow up as decent human beings" (Hagman 1906a, 129) and, therefore, echoes Snellman's vision of women's family-related responsibilities, she more often connects the expression to public action. Women, like men, are responsible for participating in the life of the nation, and for shaping its social and political institutions. Hence, the struggle for the vote is a *siveellinen* act par excellence. According to Hagman, women have a "*siveellinen* responsibility to fight for their right to vote", and refusing to cast ones vote is, accordingly, a "*siveellinen* crime". (Hagman: Tärkein parannus äänioikeusasiassa; Hagman 1906, 23; Hagman 1908b, 118–120; Hagman 1909, 13.)

In the argumentation of women's rights activists, ideas about "*siveellinen* freedom" and "*siveellinen* responsibility", and the typical discourse for the era involving the deepest essence of womanhood are intertwined. A "true woman" understands her "*siveellinen* responsibility" and participates in public life. On the other hand, only a woman who is "free in a *siveellinen* way" – i.e. independent, self-reflective and devoted to the nation – will be able to bring values related to "true womanhood" into political decision-making. (e.g. Hallstén 1908, 5; Räsänen 1906, 11; von Troil 1906, 73; Hagman 1907, 51.)

This is a significant conceptual shift from the earlier understanding of the relationship between women and the concept of *siveellisyys*. In her texts, Lucina Hagman, in particular, subverts the idea implied by Snellman that true womanhood would be connected to the family and tradition and that only men constitute the force of cultural change capable of civic action.

Although women's rights activists did not adopt the gendered character of the concept, Snellmanian *sedlighet* in its meaning close to "civic" is present in their rhetoric when they described how women should act in politics after obtaining the right to vote. Many upper and middle class suffragists describe Finnish political life as dirty, war-like and rotten, in one word, the opposite of *siveellinen* – *epäsiveellinen*. They criticize political parties for agitation, turning "brother against brother", and looking out for their own interests instead of having the best interest of the fatherland in mind. (e.g. Friberg 1906; 1907a; 1908b). To counteract political life based on political parties, women's texts created an alternative view of political action that will be referred to here as "*siveellinen* politics". A close reading of the texts reveals that

this ideal bears similarities to the Snellmanian conception of political life in at least three ways.

First, women connect "*siveellinen* political action" to action, which advances common good and the best interests of the nation. Political action emphasizing common good does not, however, mean that women should subjugate their own views to the collective will of the nation, or that they should listen to the authorities that claim to speak for the nation. In "*siveellinen* political action" an individual's own reason, consciousness, and heart are the main criteria for making decisions. According to Hilma Räsänen, a teacher who was one of the first female members of parliament, "[w]ith our eyes and ears open should we look around us, thrust with the help of the force of our own thought to the core of the current issues in order to form our opinions and conclusions without believing everything that is said" (Räsänen 1906). An anonymous writer concludes: "Only when women have enough courage to stay independent and evaluate things from the viewpoint of righteousness and truth without accepting viewpoints of political parties, can they create *siveellinen* spirit in the society" (i.g. 1907, 29).

Secondly, "*siveellinen* politics" is characterized by an emphasis on creating something new and breaking down the old order. Many suffragists understood the vote to be a tool through which women should "take part in the task of the *siveellinen* development" and create something new in the society as well as in the political life (Friberg 1906; i.g. 1907). This task does not only refer to the creation of new laws, but it also entails the moral elevation of the nation. In their texts, Maikki Friberg and Lucina Hagman emphasize the idea that the happiness of the nation is not only dependent on the political and social institutions, but also on its own spiritual development (Friberg 1907a, 5; Hagman 1909, 13). A citizen who acts in a *siveellinen* way does not only show his or her *siveellisyyt*s by leading the social change from the parliamentary podium, but also understands that the nation has to be transformed through the education that takes place in society and families. "Although the success of the members of the society is related to laws and norms, these alone do not define the development and the success of a people. [...] What is needed are sincere hearts, sober, *siveellinen* habits, and love (Hagman 1908c, 303–4)."

Thirdly, "*siveellinen* political action" should aim at bridging differences and divisions within the nation. According to the women's

rights activists the aim of political action should have been to increase the strength and the unity of the nation, not to tear it apart. (Hagman 1903, 2; Naiset vaaliuurnille 1908, 77; Uuden ajan kynnyksellä 1905, 135–136; Friberg 1906, 2.) Lucina Hagman describes women's task in politics as follows: "Let women's holy responsibility be creating and supporting this necessary unity, the understanding and the feeling of kinship among the people. [...] If we could unite rather than separate, then we would increase the strength of the nation. If we could create in our political life a deeper *siveellinen* understanding (*siveellinen arvontunne*), then our participation would not be futile." (Hagman 1906, 70.)

When the *siveellisyys*-vocabulary is used to describe the attitude needed for political action, the meaning of the term approaches the Snellmanian concept of *sedlighet* in closely implying civic, ethical action. The understanding of political action promoted by the active members of the bourgeois women's rights associations is therefore close to the creation of new rules and laws guided by individuals' personal morality, which Snellman understood as politics.

In their argumentation for the right to vote Finnish women's rights activists make a conceptual move that allows them to ground their political agency in the very same concept originally used to exclude them from the political sphere. Women's rights activists strip the highest form of *sedlighet* from its masculine connotations and suggest that women – partly because of their experiences relating to motherhood, education and peace making – should lead any social change. Women are not *siveellinen* only if the term is to be taken to mean moral, chaste or decent as often was often the case in everyday language. Women are also civic. On the other hand the Snellmanian concept *sedlighet* functions as a frame through which women define the ideal form of politics. One could say that despite the conceptual subversion women's rights activists keep the Snellmanian vision of ethical political action and common good alive in a country that they see as internally torn.

***Siveellisyys* as a normative concept**

Although Finnish women's rights activists' conception of political action is reminiscent of that of J. V. Snellman, there are also significant

differences between Snellman's *sedlighet* and the way the women's rights activists use the term *siveellisyys*. As Tuija Pulkkinen (2003, 255) emphasizes, Snellman uses the term *sedlighet* to refer to an attitude towards norms, not to the content of those norms. However, when the Finnish upper and middle class women at the turn of the twentieth century used the term, they filled it with a stable normative content. Depending on the writer, the normative message is a combination of motherhood, Christian principles and modern values such as equality. In the argumentation of the women's rights activists, the term *siveellisyys* not only describes the political nature of action in a Snellmanian vein, but also a certain set of moral norms that women should establish as the ground for the state and society.

In this sense, the way women's rights activists use the term *siveellisyys* resonates with the changes in the use of the term that took place when Snellman's notion was slowly popularized, and when his concepts took life outside their original context. Towards the end of the 19th century, the term *siveellisyys* had lost part of its Snellmanian meaning and was commonly used to praise Christianity and enforce traditional habits. According to Maria Jalava, in particular, the so-called 'Fennoman' political movement,⁵ which suffragists close to the Finnish Women's Association sympathized with, read Snellman in such a way as to displace the dialectics of the individual and the community with a requirement to obey the authorities. Moreover, creative cultural and political agency was displaced by conformity to existing norms, and culture in the flux was replaced by a set of unchangeable values and norms, the substance of which was derived from Christianity. (Jalava 2005, 204–207.)

Christianity played an important role in the lives and the worldview of the Finnish upper and middle class women and was also used as one base for the arguments for women's political participation (Markkola 2002; Ollila 2000). In the argumentation for suffrage, the term *siveellisyys*, as an attribute of political action, included the idea of social change and development, but at the same time it is clear that, for many women, the only true change in the polity was connected to the expansion of Christian values. When women's rights activists argued that women's task was to bring more *siveellisyys* into politics, many of them were actually saying that women should introduce Christian values as the basis of laws and institutions. (e.g. Vaalit lähestyvät 1908, 49). For example, Aleksandra Gripenberg, the figurehead of the

Finnish Women's Association, writes that in order to bring *siveellisyy*s into political life women should not only "search for satisfaction from the plurality of politics", but "also follow in politics the eternal constitution of Christianity" (Gripenberg 1905, 92–93).

In the texts of the suffragists, *siveellisyy*s is connected, apart from Christianity, to maternal values and the so-called "social motherhood" (Sulkunen 1990). Hagman contrasts giving birth with "*siveellinen* motherhood", which not only entails the education of the new generation, but also "impregnating the laws and the society with the feeling of motherhood" (Hagman 1908a, 121; Hagman 1908b, 135).

Several women's rights activists understood women's political participation as worthless or even dangerous if it did not conform to the frames of the "*siveellinen* politics" that the leading figures in the women's rights organizations were drafting. For example, Maikki Friberg argued constantly that women's political participation was a problem rather than a benefit when women took part in the disputes between political parties. (Friberg 1908b, 140–142; Friberg 1908a, 146–148.) Alexandra Gripenberg explains that "...unless women bring [Christian principles] with them, their political participation will be doomed..." (Gripenberg 1905, 92). Although Lucina Hagman criticized some of her fellow women's right activists for grounding their arguments for women's participation on utility rather than justice (Hagman 1906a, 32), she also implied that women's participation in politics was useless if women did not spread a "*siveellinen* understanding in politics" (e.g. Hagman 1906, 70).

The ideal of "*siveellinen* politics", therefore, became a framework, which was expected to guide the aims and ways of the political participation of women from all social classes. Although the term *siveellisyy*s was often used to empower women, it was also used to define the boundaries of the good female citizen. In this case the different dimensions of the term function side by side. In contexts where the term is used to describe political action, regarding the norms or the attitude guiding one's action, it emphasized unity and veiled important differences between women. When the term received a meaning connoting sexual morality, differences and hierarchies were created.

As has already been pointed out, for suffragists bringing *siveellisyy*s into politics was an attempt to overcome differences and unify the fatherland. The same ideal of unity is applied to the group of the "female citizens" which is constructed through the argumentation.

Although Lucina Hagman admitted that the place of residence, occupation, social class, and language were factors influencing women's political opinion, when it came to the issues that she refers to as "*siveellinen* core questions", for example, temperance, prostitution and education, she expected women to have a unified front (Hagman 1906a). From the point of view of "*siveellinen* politics", all other differences appear inferior to sex. In political life women should be a unified group overcoming divisions between political parties, "leading the state in a *siveellinen* direction."

When the women use the term *siveellisyys* to connote sexual morality and restrained sexuality, it functions as an efficient tool for making hierarchies and distinctions. This becomes particularly visible when we look at the controversies between the upper and middle class women and working class women at the beginning of the 20th century. Although the issues women debated varied from the status of female servants to women's night work and to state support for single mothers and their children, these debates were conducted using the *siveellisyys*-vocabulary. The topic of the discussion was not only whether the state should build homes for single mothers or not, but also the way in which *siveellisyys* should be defined, and, furthermore, who could be defined as *siveellinen*.

The organization of marriage was one significant cause for controversy. The *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* magazine edited by the Finnish Women's Association condemned working class women and women from the countryside, among whom sex before marriage and children out of wedlock were common, as *epäsiveellinen*. Working class women activists renounced the proposed definitions of what constituted a "*siveellinen* marriage" and "*siveellinen* womanhood". According to Social Democratic Party activist Hilda Pärssinen, the biggest crimes against *siveellisyys* were the organized marriages that still took place within the upper classes, in which women were "selling themselves for economic reasons to men they do not love and men secretly meeting prostitutes" (Pärssinen 1907).

Another heatedly debated issue was the so called "servant problem". *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*-magazine labeled female servants as a "*siveellinen* threat" for families, and some writers even required servants to be forced to undergo tests for sexually transmitted diseases. In *Palvelijatarlehti*, a magazine that served as the public voice of servants and other women of lower social classes, the servants replied to these ac-

cusations and criticized the “*siveellinen* danger” caused by upper class men that young and innocent girls from the countryside faced after taking service in the cities.

In the texts of working class women, the term *siveellisyy*s rarely received meanings related to political life. Yet when the term was used in relation to the “*siveellisyy*s problem” and sexual morality, the working class women activists actively aimed at redefining the term and questioning the meanings given to it by the upper and middle class women. Evidently, there was a struggle for power to define what made a person *siveellinen*. This hints to more than a disagreement regarding the organization of the family and the marriage being at stake. In this context *siveellisyy*s is not discussed as a political idea but has a meaning close to common decency and one’s capacity to live according to moral norms. Nevertheless, it is a powerful concept and its usages have political consequences. The term is used to evoke hierarchies between the decent and the indecent, as such, classifying the actions or thoughts of an individual or a group as indecent is a way to question their abilities to act as citizens in the political sphere. Here, the meaning of the term *siveellisyy*s close to common decency and ability to live sexually pure life is made a precondition for making political decisions. *Siveellisyy*s as decency becomes a precondition for *siveellisyy*s as civic action.

The idea of citizenship that the bourgeois women’s rights activists constructed in their argumentation for the suffrage is gendered. While including women in the definition of citizenship, women constructed a specific form of female citizenship parallel to that of men (e.g. Sulkunen 1987; Ollila 1993). The sexualization of this new conception of citizenship can be added to this generally accepted interpretation; in other words, the concept of citizenship was also sexualized because the citizen was defined as heterosexual, family-orientated, and chaste. Women, whose sexuality did not conform to this ideal, were not seen as legitimate citizens. Instead they were conceptualized as the targets of the elevating and educating action of the female citizens who fulfilled the requirements of *siveellisyy*s, and were both civic and decent.

The ideal of the civic and decent mother-citizen, which Hagman, Gripenberg and other bourgeois women advocated, was an emancipatory public role, but it also limited the possibilities of female political agency. It seems that the civic/decent mother-citizen became the only culturally acceptable female figure through which women could be

intelligible political agents. Their abilities as citizens were measured in relation to how well they adopted this identity. On the basis of this ideal, women were divided into decent female citizens and indecent women, who were not civic enough to be political actors.

Conclusion: Active conceptual politics

In the usages of the term *siveellisyys* in Finnish women's argumentation for the right to vote, the Snellmanian idea of *siveellisyys/sedlighet* as political action which is based on one's own moral choices, the aims of developing the nation is clearly present. In comparison to the way Snellman saw women, as the conservative force of the society, and understood *siveellisyys* in its highest form as an attribute of educated men's political action, Finnish women's rights activists brought about a significant conceptual shift. They feminized the political concept *siveellisyys* and grounded themselves as the very group of people who were the most competent to lead the nation. In their texts, *siveellisyys* also receives a stable, value-related meaning connected to motherhood and Christianity. In these texts, women's use of the term refers both to the attitude of one's actions in the Snellmanian sense, and also to the concrete aims women should try to reach through their political action. Another relevant meaning of the term is related to sexuality and sexual morality, to the idea of a *siveellinen* person as sexually pure and chaste.

Whereas the usages of the term that refer to civic action in the Snellmanian sense are mostly empowering, the usages of *siveellisyys* to connote decency and sexual morality have a strict normative aspect. The intertwining of these two dimensions of the term in women's argumentation has made *siveellisyys* a key concept through which it is possible to establish unity between women and the same time create hierarchies, to argue for women's participation in politics, and to recommend how they should act politically.

Examining the usages and meanings of the term *siveellisyys* sheds light on the ideological-political context in which Finnish women's argumentation for suffrage took place. The *siveellisyys*-vocabulary contains the Snellmanian ideas of political action and political community influenced by the German philosophical tradition. The links are visible in the examples of women's discussions about "*siveellinen*

freedom". "*Siveellinen* freedom" includes both a strong idea of inner growth and development of the self and an idea of the individual's responsibility for the nation. Therefore, the political role women required in their argumentation did not culminate in asking for political rights in the liberal sense, but instead comprised a strong idea of the individual's responsibility for developing into an independent person and for articulating the wishes and needs of the nation, leading the social and political change.

Women's rights activists emphasized that heart and reason should guide women's political choices. It is significant that this self-reflective attitude is only evoked when the bottom line of the writer is that women should question the masculine order in politics. Values and ideals, which women's rights activists themselves wanted to bring into laws and political institutions, were not similarly open for the criticism by women of all social classes. In practice a small group of upper and middle class women defined the "*siveellinen* politics" that was expected to guide the public activities of all women. Simultaneously they froze the connotations of the Snellmanian meaning of the term related to creativity and social change and reduced it to a mixture of Christian values and motherhood.

In the rhetoric of the bourgeois suffragists the different meanings of the term *siveellisyys* (and the adjective *siveellinen*) — sexual morality and creative civic action — are intimately connected. Suffragists linked *siveellisyys* as pure sexual morality to the individual's ability to make decisions about the future of the nation and made it, consequently, as a prerequisite for one's political agency. Bourgeois women thought that working class women had loose sexual morality, therefore the latter were subsequently expected to blindly accept the definition that the former gave to the term when they defined the "*siveellinen* direction" in which the nation should be developed.

It seems that as a normative identity and a form of political action the civic/decent mother-citizen and the "*siveellinen* politics" excluded other ways of being a woman and other ways of acting politically. When women's rights activists included sex in the definition of citizenship and political action, they actively created new borders to define who was to be counted as a citizen, and the ways in which the *siveellisyys* should guide the actions of citizens.

NOTES

1. The standard English translation of *Sittlichkeit* in literature on Hegel, “ethical life”, does not convey the important element of *Sitten* (mores, habits), which is the central element in both the German (*Sitten – Sittlichkeit*) and Swedish (*sed – sedlighet*) words. Moreover, the Finnish word *siveellisyys* does not have this connection.
2. Snellman was one of the key thinkers of the Fennomanian movement, which strived to promote the use of Finnish instead of Swedish in public life, and his thinking significantly influenced Fennoman political thought.
3. In much of literature on Snellman the political dimension of *sedlighet* is not the focus, rather the concept is discussed in relation to the family. (e.g. Hämäläinen 2005; Karkama 1994.)
4. The relevant and consulted newspapers are *Koti & Yhteiskunta* (1889–1911) published by the Finnish Women’s Association, *Nutid* (1895–1917) and *Naisten Ääni* (1905–1949) published by the Women’s Rights Association Unioni, *Emäntälehti* (1903–) by the Martha Association, and *Palvelijatarlehti* (1905–6) and *Työläisnainen* (1906–1923) published by the working class women activists.
5. The Fennomans were an important political movement in the Grand Duchy of Finland in the 19th century. In the first part of the 19th century the Fennoman language reformers aimed to improve the status of the Finnish language and to promote Finnish culture. Toward the end of the 19th century the movement split into two political parties, the conservative Old Finnish Party, which supported co-operation with Russia, and the more liberal Young Finnish Party, which opposed the Russification efforts.

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